

19th Sunday in ordinary Time, C

“Be like servants who await their master’s return.”

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

One reality of life is waiting; waiting for someone to show up, for something to happen, for things to change. Another reality of life is that most of us do not like waiting. We look for the shortest line at the grocery store and the bank. We become impatient, even angry, waiting for the doctor or the waiter who is slow or inattentive. And look how we behave when the Coke machine is slow to deliver or the elevator is slow to begin moving. Lots of buttons are being pushed – the machine’s and ours.

Sometimes it seems like life is nothing more than waiting. As children, we wait for Christmas, summer vacation, and to grow up. As adults, we wait for just the right job, that special someone who will make our life complete, a promotion, or retirement. Some people wait for the diagnosis, others for a cure. Some wait for the day the pain will stop, and the grief will end. Others wait for the answer to their prayers. Many of us wait for that day when we have enough time, enough money, enough freedom, and the day we will live happily ever after.

At some level, waiting takes place every day. Each of us could name the things or people for which we wait. Sometimes we live with the overwhelming feeling of waiting, but with no clear idea of what we are waiting for.

When I look at my waiting, I realize that I generally don't wait in the present. I either move into the past or the future. The great tragedy is that in doing so, I lose the present moment. That's part of what makes waiting so painful and challenging.

Waiting in the future most often brings fear and anxiety about what will happen. We are haunted by the unknown and a lack of control. Waiting in the past brings sadness, anger, or guilt about things that have happened, or things that were done and left undone. As difficult as our present circumstances may be, that is the only place where we can ever be fully alive. It is the only place we can truly experience God.

When we move out of the present – either way, into the past or the future – we not only postpone life; we deny life. We deny our resurrection. We desecrate the sacrament of the present moment. We have refused the gift of God's kingdom.

Everyone, everywhere, in every age waits. Jesus does not eliminate waiting. If anything, it sounds like just the opposite. He tells the crowd, **“Be like servants who await their master's return.”**

Today's gospel is not, however, simply about passing time. It is about presence and being present. Jesus sees waiting as an act of faithfulness; the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So, we are mistaken if we think today's gospel describes an absent God, a God who left some time ago, for whom we wait. We are equally wrong if we believe we are waiting for a God who lives out in the future.

Jesus is teaching us how and where to wait. He is inviting us to be present to the One who is always already present. He is inviting us to listen for the knock, to watch, and to be alert. He is inviting us to be present to the reality of God in each other, in the world, and ourselves. This is the God who is present in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, even in our waiting.

We might be tempted to ask, **“So where is God in all our waiting?”** But maybe the better question is, **“Where are we?”**

Jesus says, **“Be dressed for action. Something is going on right now. Right here. And I want you to be a part of it. Come participate, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. This is for you.”**

“Have your lamps lit,” he says. **“There is something to see. Move out of the darkness. Come into the light. See what is right in front of you, what is all around you, and what is within you. For the Father wants you to have the kingdom.”**

“Be alert,” he commands. But this isn’t a threat of punishment. It is an invitation to be blessed. **“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant.”** Jesus is not just inviting us to be awake, to be ready, and to be watchful. He is calling us to be fully alive and to remain alive. Blessing and life are synonymous in God’s kingdom. It is as if Jesus is saying to us, **“Be alert, be blessed, and I will come and serve you. I will feed you the bread of life. I will serve you the cup of salvation.”**

All of this, Jesus says, happens at an unexpected hour. Like a thief in the night, the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

So, when is the unexpected hour? When will all this happen? Well, I guess that for most of us, maybe all of us, the most unexpected hour is today, right here, right now.

My dear Brothers and Sisters,

The most unexpected hour is the hour spent in the hospital waiting room; the hour sitting next to the phone waiting for news of a loved one; the hour praying for a miracle; the hour in which we wait for clarity and a way forward; the hour waiting for the grief to end and life to return to normal; the hour in which it seems as if nothing is happening, life is not the way we want, and there is nowhere to go.

We must be prepared, for at an hour we do not expect, the Son of Man will come. **Amen.**